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Statement submitted by All India Women's Education Fund Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Khadi Goes Global

Khadi is a hand-woven fabric that transformed India's independence struggle under the guidance of the apostle of peace, Mahatama Gandhi. He said that khadi connotes the beginning of economic freedom and equality of all in the country. Today, almost 100 years later, AIWEFA brings khadi to the United Nations with Khadi Goes Global — a programme that has transformative potential to enable women's empowerment through economic livelihoods.

This programme addresses women's roles, needs, interests and the structural constraints they face in society through fostering an environment of self-reliance through skill development towards financial independence. In a nation of 1.2 billion people, this initiative can help India take a lead and provide a template to ensure women's empowerment and the successful implementation of the sustainable development goals.

2019 marks the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. It commemorates 100 years of khadi and coincides with the 90th foundation year of the All India Women's Education Fund Association (AIWEFA). Established in 1929 under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi for the welfare and education of women and youth, the organization is also the founding body of the prestigious Home Science College, the Lady Irwin College.

This programme is supported by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, the Khadi Village and Industries Commission, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry Ladies Organization and other partners. It is intrinsic to Gandhi's core philosophy of non-violence and is central to the United Nations sustainable development goals to provide economic empowerment and livelihoods through sustainable living. It is also integral to AIWEFA's 90-year-old history of education and training that envisages women in leadership roles.

At the sixty third session of the Commission on Status of Women, the organization seeks to take forward the programme "Khadi Goes Global," as it epitomizes the United Nation's priority theme: social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In 2015, when countries adopted a set of goals to end poverty, the organization channeled all programmes and strategies by including the gender and youth perspective towards achieving the 2030 agenda for change. To make the sustainable development goals better known and translate them into implementation plans, the organization examined the developmental activities of Nindana village in the Indian state of Haryana. These achievements were linked to national policies and welfare schemes and further correlated with the specific sustainable development goal and sub goal with tangible indicators that were preferred by rural youth and women.

In 2016, to provide a global outlook to local initiatives, the organization launched an impact study "A world we women want", to map rich implementation strategies based on grassroots voices from India, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and Africa. This study envisaged women in leadership roles, in charge of their own empowerment and not as mute beneficiaries. On 15 March 2016, at the Church Centre, New York, the organization held a Parallel Event with panelists from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Malawi and released "A world we women want: a compendium on women's voices and good practices towards sustainable development goals of the United Nations".

Copies of this compendium were shared with United Nations Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

A major conclusion in the compendium, was that women themselves voiced a desperate need for sustainable livelihood opportunities near their homes, easy access to finance to set up small enterprises, easy forward and backward linkages to sustain their business initiatives, as these were not getting fulfilled to the required extent with the value chain approach.

On 14 March 2017 in the Hardin Room of the Church Centre, New York, the organization held a Parallel Event on the priority theme. Though the organization participated via skype due to financial constraints, the global south panel discussion included speakers from India, El Salvador, and Fiji; the publication "Good practices from India towards achieving the 2030 agenda for sustainable development" was released; a global south website "A world we women want" was launched to capture transformational strategies from South America, Africa, India-Asia Pacific in financial inclusion, agriculture, enterprise growth, technology access, capacity building, business leadership and data collection.

Responding to the necessities of different periods, the organization, through recent programmes, imparted new technology access in cyber security to college youth; provided progressive employment opportunities for women in safe car driving and initiated training as financial advisers; organized workshops in intergenerational bonding to build community strength and conducted the conference "Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellness in old age" with activities for seniors and a fashion show for and by seniors. Rural initiatives included renewable energy programmes, nursery plantations and training to enhance agriculture produce. Yet, the voices from the grassroots continued their demand to provide them with additional revenue making livelihoods.

The search for a solution to break the cycle of poverty and deprivation with a livelihood that could supplement farm income, led to the humble cotton length of khadi fabric.

Khadi spinning and weaving ranks next only to agriculture in generating employment and creating sustainable livelihoods. It impacts the most deprived section of agriculture workers by providing an additional and sustainable livelihood; it addresses time poverty as it allows khadi workers to spin and weave on their looms within the environs of their own homes; it negates a gendered response as the whole family devotes time to this enterprise during their spare hours.

Viewed through the prism of khadi, this programme addresses the social objective of providing employment; the economic objective of producing saleable articles; the wider objective of creating self-reliance among the poor and building up a strong rural community spirit.

Creating an awareness of a fabric with a low-carbon-footprint, one that conserves energy, reduces greenhouse gases and is climate friendly, Khadi Goes Global provides a template towards achieving the sustainable development goals.

This programme envisages partnerships through women's collectives, clusters or self-help groups which would be formed according to the interest and expertise of the women who would nominate their own leader. Master craftsmen would provide information to improve the quality of the weaving; designers could create traditional designs with an international appeal; master cutters, tailors, embellisers and finishers would stitch garments according to international requirements and as per international standards overseen by the organization. The organization will provide marketing linkages and handhold the collectives till they are able to conduct the business on

their own. Such an initiative is being considered in the aspirational district of Balangir in the Indian state of Odisha.

Towards interlinking social protection, infrastructure and public services, the programme recognizes women not just as workers, but also as carers and as citizens who are able to express their needs and priorities to design and implement a transformative approach that addresses structural constraints and power relations, both in the market and in families and communities.

The organization takes inspiration from a group of village women in Maharashtra, India, who defined their visions of social change and worked out ways to measure that change. Drawing stick figures with a dry twig on a dusty ground, the women drew images inside a large circle to depict gender inequality from their perspective. This portrayal included girls working in cotton fields outside a school full of boys, and a woman begging for work from the landlord. In another circle, they showed how the world would look if gender equality became a reality: these pictures illustrated girls going to school, a woman ploughing fields and a man doing housework while his wife attended a meeting.

They used these pictures to develop an action plan to measure indicators they were familiar with. Women who agreed to send their daughters to school signed a pledge; women's groups identified and sought various trainings, like hand pump repair, and others. To ensure if the group was making any progress, the women used tangible indicators that were relevant to their daily lives towards measuring success in the given context like counting the enhancement in the number of days of agricultural work for women and augmentation in the number of girls enrolled in school.

The familiar use of images helped reduce barriers in participation due to poor literacy levels that may prevail in our countries. As repositories of traditional wisdom, sustainable practices, folk art and culture, rural women from the global south can show us the practical way to achieve the 2030 agenda for development.